

reference would seem to be to an island in the same region. I find, in fact, in the "Hamy" Chart of about 1502, a name which may possibly read "Y. de S. Matteo" applied to one of the islands in the gulf. Moreover, in Sir George Peckham's discourse on Western Planting, printed by Hakluyt (Maclehose's Edition, viii. p. 127), 'S. Mattheue' is named along with Principe, Anobom, and S. Thomé, as an island under the equinoctial line, peopled by the Portuguese.

The shifting of the island to a very different longitude need cause no surprise in view of the vagueness of the early records, and could easily be matched by other similar instances. An excuse for so placing it might perhaps be found in the marking of an island, in the exact position eventually adopted for Saint Matthew, in a Portuguese MS. chart of about 1516, ascribed to the Reinels. Here the island is named 'A Trynidade,' due possibly to confusion with the island of Trinidad in the S.W. Atlantic, discovered in 1502 by Estevão da Gama. But like Ascension (which was an alternative name for the latter Trinidad) the name was no doubt bestowed on many different islands.

The earliest map in which I have so far found the fictitious island is the famous Ribero map of 1529. Later it reappears regularly in the charts of the Desceliers School of Dieppe, in the Portuguese charts of the Homems, in the Italian engraved maps of Gastaldi and others, though the name is not always the same nor always clearly legible. It is *not* to be found in the MS. chart of Pero Fernandez of 1528. Possibly some other correspondent may be able to give a more certain explanation. E. HEAWOOD.

#### Contractions for Titles of Periodicals.

THE letter from Capt. Sheppard, under the above title, in NATURE of Aug. 25, raises a question of no little interest and importance to all those who are concerned in any way with the use of scientific periodicals, for the general adoption of a standard list of contractions for the titles of periodicals is much needed.

Unlike Capt. Sheppard, however, I can see no reason why the list given in the "World List" should not be used for this purpose. It is immaterial that we do not all agree with the contractions used for the individual words. Should we ever agree? The point is that here is for the first time a very carefully compiled and complete list, with a ready key to the abbreviations used, and if it were universally adopted, whatever blemishes it contains would soon be lost sight of in the advantages that would be provided.

Capt. Sheppard's criticism that the contractions for the separate words are not uniform is, I think, beside the point. The compilers of the list have, as it seems to me, disregarded the separate word entirely and have taken the whole title as the unit. They have attempted so to contract the title as a whole that this becomes quite short and is yet distinguished from all other titles in the list. That is why *Argus* is not qualified by the place of publication—there is no other title *Argus*, and therefore no chance of confusion. Where there is likely to be confusion, a distinction is drawn—as, for example, *Farmer, Chicago*, and *Farmer, St. Paul*. For quite obviously, the second volume of the "World List" containing the contractions is intended to be used with the first volume, to which it is cross-referenced by the numerical order of the entries. An inquirer does not have to guess what *Argus* means. He turns up Vol. 1 and, by means of the number given against the contraction, at once finds the full title and place of publication.

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There is, it is true, a snag here which must be avoided when tracing a contracted title. For the contractions, being in the exact order of the full titles, are not always in strict alphabetical order among themselves. Thus the contraction *Ann.* has five distinct alphabets representing in the full list *Annaes*, *Annalen*, *Annales*, *Annali*, and *Annals*, and care must be exercised to ensure that a contraction is being looked for in its proper group. But a little experience of the list will soon accustom a reader to the arrangements of such entries as this, and no difficulty should arise. (*Glaser's Ann.* is perhaps a glaring example, for it occurs amongst the *A's* where it would certainly not be looked for, but in this particular case the periodical is so well known that few should be misled.)

There is no other list in existence so comprehensive, and to the compilation of which so much thought has been given, and it will be a pity if, instead of making use of it, we waste our time in arguing over details which, after all, will always remain matters of opinion.

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#### Isotopes of Neon.

IN one of his earlier papers, Aston (*Phil. Mag.*, **39**, 444; 1920) found three isotopes of neon, Ne<sup>20</sup>, Ne<sup>21</sup>, and Ne<sup>22</sup>. Distinct indications of Ne<sup>21</sup> were obtained only on the clearest spectra, and he estimated that, if this constituent exists, its proportion was probably less than one per cent. In his more recent work (*Proc. Roy. Soc.*, **115 A**, 487; 1927) apparently no evidence of the isotope Ne<sup>21</sup> was obtained.

In a study of the ionisation process of methane, using a mass-spectrograph of the Dempster type, we have had occasion to use neon as a calibrating gas, and, under a great variety of experimental conditions, we have always observed an ion with a mass 21 corresponding to Ne<sup>21</sup>. This ion was never observed when neon was absent, nor could it be a hydride of Ne<sup>20+</sup>, since it was obtained with pure neon and no corresponding ion of mass 23 was found.

There are, then, three isotopes of neon, as was first reported by Aston, and we estimate that atmospheric neon is composed of about ten per cent Ne<sup>22</sup>, two per cent Ne<sup>21</sup>, and the remainder Ne<sup>20</sup>.

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#### Corpuscular Theory.

HAVING been urged to direct attention to a paper by myself read to the British Association fifty years ago, on a corpuscular-wave-theory of light, founded upon Le Sage's theory of gravity, I sent a letter to NATURE which appeared in the issue of Sept. 8. In that letter I say that, in 1878, the chief difficulty seemed to relate to refraction, and the reduced velocity of light in a dense medium. I ought to have added that the hypothesis that then seemed the most suitable for explaining the diminished velocity of light in dense media is due to the necessary wriggling of ultramundane corpuscles round the atoms, thus lengthening the distance to be traversed, and diminishing the velocity of the wave-front.

GEORGE FORBES.

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